DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 004 CS 206 200

AUTHOR Nilsen, Don L. F.
TITLE Bilingual and Bidialectical Language Play.
PUB DATE Mar 81
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (32nd, Dallas, TX, March 26-28, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingualism; Classroom Techniques; Code Switching (Language); Cultural Pluralism; *Dialect Studies; Higher Education; *Humor; *Language Attitudes; *Language Patterns; Language Usage; Secondary Education; Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Writing teachers should consider cultural pluralism as a rich resource in their classrooms, rather than as a distraction with which to cope. Because speakers of nonstandard English have important language skills in at least two different dialects, teachers should not only teach the standard dialect but also invite nonstandard English speaking students to share their language differences. Exploring both bidialectalism and bilingualism can bring humor into a composition classroom. Numerous examples from Spanish, French, Italian, German, Yiddish, and Dari (the language of Afghanistan) demonstrate the possibilities of bilingual language play with English. Bilingual and bidialectal language mergers should be appreciated as a kind of folk-poetry that can pique students' curiosity and lead them to a fascination with language study. (AEA)

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Bilingual and Bidialectical Language Play*

Don L. F. Nilsen
Arizona State University

A story is told about an educator who aks a black what should be done about the "black problem." The black responds, "Dey ain't no black problem; dey a white problem." One of the great ironies of our education system is that at the same time the system is trying to teach English and French and Spanish to Americans, it is somehow signalling to the blacks of Detroit and the Chicanos of Texas and the Frenchmen of Montreal that their language is some sort of social disease to be cured.

Cultural pluralism is not something we have to cope with in the composition class. It is a fantastic and marvelous resource that can be used to make composition classes much more exciting. Speakers of nonstandard English living in the United States have some very important language skills in at least two different dialects. Rather than telling black students that they are inferior because they donöt have an excellent command of standard formal written English, tell them that they have some very important linguistic skills that are very different from, and, in many cases, superior to the linguistic skills of speakers of standard English. These are linguistic skills that many standard speakers are only vaguely aware of, like jiving, shucking, rapping, coming down hard, louding sounding, laying it on, running it down, running a game, playing the dozens (e.g. ya mammaing) and other types of linguistic styling. At the same time as teachers are teaching the standard dialect, they should be letting nonstandard speaking students tell the class something about their language games. Not only will teachers learn something about the way language works but, in addition, the students will gain a higher impression of themselves. They will be less on the defensive, more receptive to the study of standard formal written English, and able to make a much more positive contribution to the class. Once it is accepted by the class that didialecticalism and bilingualism is a good thing the classroom atmosphere becomes less tense. Humor is an important teaching tool, but only if humor makes as much fun of standard formal written English as it does of nonstandard dialect.

* This paper was originally read at the CCCC Convention in Dallas, Texas on March 26, 1981, as part of Section B-11: "Coping with Cultural Pluralism in the Composition Class." The author is indebted to John Hakac (ASU English Department) for the Brooklyn example and to Eugene Valentine (ASU English Department) for the French Humpty-Dumpty example.

A speaker of standard English meets a person from Brooklyn in a park. The Brooklynite speaks first, "Chec', look at da boids." The standard speaker responds, "Those aren't boids;'they're birds,'" to which Brooklynite reacts with "Dat's funny, dey choip like boids." Have we offended the Brooklynite? Perhaps a little, but the story launches us into a discussion of dialects. Humor happens in prestige dialects as well as in nonprestige dialects. Many people have the impression that British English is somehow superior to American English, yet they laugh at the British nurse who asked by a patient, "Did I come here to die?" "No," she responded, "it was yesterdie." Or they laugh at the misunderstanding that occurs between a Britisher who says he works in a hotel as a clerk, and an American who thinks he must therefore sit around all day going "tick tock tick tock." These anecdotes simply aren't funny to a person who doesn't have some bidialectical facility.

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England and American are two *regions* where the English language is spoken. In England the Northumbrian dialect is not the same as the West Saxon dialect. An American who pronounces *Mrs.* as Miz., who talks about *fritters*, and about carrying someone home, and who says he "*belongs to be* careful," is not using incorrect forms, but only regional forms, which are perfectly appropriate to some contexts, and completely inappropriate to other contexts in which standard formal written English or some other form of English is expected.

In encouraging bilingual skills, the realization is essential that some errors are more salient than are others. Some errors are interesting because every bit of linguistic evidence in the error, like every bit of linguistic evidence in a particular poem, equally supports both levels of meaning. Some examples of such errors containing interference from Spanish follow:

This is a berry good milkshake.
They were feeding father to the cows.
I saw three sheeps come sailing by.
My favorite collar is jello.
Now that she had a new glasses she was better able to wash the children.
I mate him more than once.

Spanish students will also need to be taught to alert themselves to English-Spanish false cognates, like *tune* "prickly pear," *groseria* "vulgarism," molestar "to bother," *duchar* "to shower," *embarazada* "pregnant," and *constipado* "having a stuffed up nose." Spanish students must also be taught how compounding work in English so that they will not produce such sentences as "She is a wife-house."

In teaching English it should not be considered a replacement for Spanish. Some of the examples above are interesting only to those who know something about both languages. Both English and Spanish dead metaphors are exciting. In English the expression *barley beards* occurs; in Spanish the same metaphor, *barba*, is used to refer to a comet. English speakers talk about having a *deadline*. In Spanish a speed trap is called a *soldado muerto* "dead soldier." In English there is an *egghead*. In Spanish a person's fingertip is called *yema* "yolk." If an American looses a fight he *cries uncle*. Spanish cufflinks are called *gemelos* "twins."

Only a person who knows something about both English and Spanish could compose or appreciate the following poem:

0Jamti Damti se sentó en un muro.
Jamti Damti se cayó muy duro.
Ni la Guardia Civil ni la Caballeria
Supieron como se incorporaria.

Who is this "Jamti Damti?" And why is this a strange pronunciation both to Spanish and to English speakers? Is the tone of "Ni la Guardia Vivil ni la Caballeria" the same as the tone of "All the king's horses and all the king's men?" "Se incorporia" means same as "Put him together again," but is it connotatively or "poetically" equivalent? Finally, isn't this version of the poem a better version for adults — at least for bilingual adults than is the original "Humpty Dumpty" version?

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Consider now some English set-ups for sime Spanish puns. In numbers one through four the Spanish wordplay in the answers is possible only in speech since the ambiguity is resolved in writing. In numbers five and six, however, the ambiguity (and therefore the word play) is as much written as it is oral:

1. How many stars are ther in the heavens?
   Cinquenta (50) — Sin Cuenta (countless)
2. How is the prisoner in a cell like a coat?
   No escape (He doesn't escape) — No es capa (It isn't a cape)
3. How is an apple like a train?
   No es pera (It isn't a pear) — No espera (It doesn't wait)
4. What is like gold but is not silver?
   Plata no es (It is not silver) — Platano es (It is a banana)
5. What does a fish do that makes it so lazy?
   Nada (It swims) — Nada (Nothing)
6. What does a sun bather do?
   Trajo traje pero nada nada. (She brought her swimming suit but she doesn't swim at all)

If monolinguals as part of a bilingual audience were to hear these questions and answers they would be perplexed and would have no idea why the bilinguals were laughing. This is the same feeling the speakers of nonstandard English must have when all of the discussions and all of the jokes and all of the understandings are in standard English.

These last examples could set-up as monolingual (Spanish) or as bilingual (English-Spanish) puns. Now consider a play on words which cannot take effect except bilingually. A Spanish speaker in an English-speaking country walks into a clothing store, and wants to buy a pair of socks. Since he doesn' speak any English, he makes his request in Spanish, and since the clerk doesn't speak any Spanish, he doesn't understand him. The Spanish speaker uses all of the language and body language at his disposal to try to communicate his message, and the clerk, understanding nothing, keeps showing him various items in the store in an attempt to find the correct one. He finally, and at random, picks up a pair of socks. At this, the Spanish speaker shouts out "Eso si que es." The clerk feels betrayed, and says, "We could have found it a lot more quickly if I'd know you knew to spell."

The present author sometimes plays tennis with Isabel Schon, an English-Spanish bilingual. During one game everyone had lost tract of the score, so we asked Isabel, who was serving. Her response was "Without elbows." This seemed to be very strange response until we finally figured out that "without elbows" in Spanish is "sin codos;" and the score of five to two in Spanish is "Cinco dos." The ambiguity is not in the orthography; in fact, the ambiguity is usually resolved in speech by a pause after "sin" or one after "cinco." But there is also a reading in rapid and casual speech that does not resolve the ambiguity. If Dr.Schon had used this more neutral reading the pun would have been much easier to figure out. Bilingual humor is quite sophisticated — so sophisticated that it took a long time to figure out the score. So sophisticated that many people don't realize that the number zero which is sometimes referred to as a "goose egg" is the monolingual equivalent of the bilingual (English-French) tennis metaphor "love," which is "l'oeuf," the French word for "the egg."

Reconsider the "Humpty-Dumpty" bilingual parody, this time in French, using a different type of language play, a type of play

whereby the choice of French words is more controlled by how much the *sound like* English words than by whatever meanings they happen to have. The result is as follows:

Un petit d'un petit
S'étonne aus Halles.
Un petit d'un petit
Ah! degrés te fallent.
Indolent qui ne sort cesse
Indolent qui ne se mène
Qu'importe un petit d'un petit
Tout Gai de Reguennes.

English-French bilingual language play is a common phenomenon. Some of the play is based on bilingual heteronyms, words which have a single spelling but two different pronunciations, like the English w-i-n-e, b-o-w, r-e-a-d, l-e-a-d, t-e-a-r, etc. Binlingual heteronyms are much more sophisticated, and therefore much more effective divices of language play. M—i-n-c-e in French means slender; in English (with a differnt pronunciation) it means to chop into very fine pieces. C-o-u-r-t in French means short; in English it means to woo. S-a-n-g in French is blood, but in English it is the past tense of sing. C-h-a-t in French is a cat; in English it refers to a ery informal conversation. And this same process goes on for l-a-m-e, c-o-i-n, c-h-o-s-e, t-i-r-e, s-i-n-g-e, d-e-n-t, r-u-e, and so on.

Another type of English-French bilingual language play involves homonyms, words which may have differnt spellings, but which have a single pronunciation. *Louis Cing* is not something which Louis did while at sea; *Coup de grâce* is not something one does with a lawn mower; *Pas de tout* is not a father of twins; and *tête-à-tête* does not refer to a bra which is too tight.

It is not surprising that bilingual language play is especially well developed in a bilingual environment such as Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Some examples are: rhyme in the name of a store that sells records, "Le Plaque Shack," A cross-cultural allusion in "Star Truck Rental" and bilingual acrostics, as when the English word *ice* is written top-to-bottom, while the French word *glace* is written left-to-right, sharing the letter c.

Montreal also has longer bilingual language-play messages. "Ne tournez pas le dos. Faites-lui face. Multiple Sclerosis attacks your spinal cord. Fight back." There is a certain similarity of sounds in the French *faites* and the English *fight*. In addition, the French version plays on the antonyms *dos-face*, while the English version plays on the synonyms *spinal cord-back*, with both the French *face* and the English *back* being used in at least two senses each. The hinge word here is *face*. It is the word spearating the French beginning from the English ending, and of course it is a word in both languages.

By far the most common type of bilingual play in Montreal is the bilingual sign, bilingual to the eyes if not to the ears. Sometimes the middle position is a prepositional phrase, as in "Poste de Police Station," "Aéroport de Montreal Airport," or "Numéro du Train Number" or the middle position is a noun with a preceding-English and following-French adjective, as in "Hot Pizza Chaude." Occasionally the middle position is an adjective with a preceding-French and following-English noun, as in "Les Distributeurs Cardinal Distributors," "Nettoyeurs Troy Cleaners," "Croisières Mill Olympia Boat Cruises," "Restaurant Bon Vivant Restaurant," and "Oratoir St-Joseph Oratory" or the middle position is an adjective with a preceding-English and a following French noun, as in "Destiny Canada Destiné" or "Château Versailles Hotel."

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As a final example of English-French language play consider loan translations, whereby a metaphor is transferred from one language to another. Through this process the strange English metaphor *hot dog* becomes the equally strange French metaphor *chien chaude*. English speakers somehow get a special lift when they see the French word for life jackets —*brassières de sauvatage* — on the life jackets; the English eponym "Mae West" comes immediately to mind. English speakers also get an additional (probably unintended) message when they read "Dames" on a ladies' restroom, or "Arrête toléré" on a parking sign or "liquor" used to refer to a soft drink.

Before leaving the Romance languages, consider what Leo Rosten said about language confusion in Italian and Spanish, for an English speaker. In a 1966 article in *Look* entitled "Wallop Yon Horse with a Parachute," Leo Rosten says that a simple English sentence like "I want my meat well done," when uttered by a Sicilian might come out as "I want my mate walled in." Later in the article Rosten explains the title of his article. He was trying to say, "I want one umbrella and a pair of man's gloves," in Spanish, but he got *parguas* "umbrella" confused with *paracaidas* "parachute." And he confused *caballo* "horse" with *caballero* "gentleman." And finally he said *guantada* "a wallop" instead of *guante* "a glove." So rather than asking for an umbrella and a pair of man's gloves, he told the clerk in effect to "give a wallop to a horse with a parachute."

Consider now language play in two German dialects: High German and Yiddish. German has some very interesting dead metaphors. If people are tough, they are said to *Haare auf den Zähnen haben*, "have hairs on the teeth. If they have big plans they *Rosinen im Kopf haben* "little goosefeet" in German. These metaphors are all fresh to the non-German learning German. English dead metaphors are equally fresh to a non-English speaker learning English — metaphors like *a budding genius*, or *a blooming idiot* — metaphors like *footnotes* and *headlines* — metaphors like *bottleneck* and *traffic jam*. Some German dead metaphors are especially interesting when compared and contrasted with English dead metaphors. In English people *make a mountain out of a molehill*; in German *aus einer Mücke einen Elefanten* "an elephant out of a gnat." In English people can refer to a *bookworm*, while in German a similar person is referred to as a *Leseratte* "read-rat." If something *bugs* an English speaker it would *worm* a German speaker - "Es wormt mich."

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Bilingual mistakes are especially interesting when they reinforce more than a single meaning. Some Spanish example were given earlier, but now consider some Yiddish examples. In a chapter on vocabulary learning in Leonard Q Ross's *The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N* (1968, pages 33-42), Hyman Kaplan is given the items *haven*, *pitcher*, *fascinate*, and *university* to put into sentences. These were the results:

"In sommer, ve all *heaven* a fine time."

"Plizz take milk from de *pitcher*. Fine! De *pitcher* hengs cockeye! Also fine ! *Pitcher*...*pitcher*."

"In India is all kinds *snake-fescinators*."

"Elaven yiss is married mine vife an' minesalf, so is commink for our tvalft *univoisity*."

Another student in the same ESL-class was asked to use *enamel*. She said, "*Enamel* is used for painting charis," to which Mr. Kaplan responds, "Mistake by Milnick! Ha! "Mit *enimals* she is painting chairs?

In these examples the language play is both intentional and unintentional. From the standpoint of the author, Leo Rosten, it is intentional. But from the standpoint of the character, Hyman Kaplan, it is unintentional. This example, the Spanish example and others like them can be used not only to lighten up a class and make i more fun, but to explain to students that errors of this type are inveitable for people learning foreign languages, and that there are ways to avoid such errors if they are to be avoided, or to produce them if they are to be produced — certainly much of the success of Charro is the result of her faulty pronunciation of such words as "sucsex."

In turning from the bilingual language play involving English and various European languages to that involving English and non-European languages consider Dari, the Farsi language spoken in Afghanistan. The sign painters in Kabul, Afghanistan are English-Dari bilingual. Since the rules of English capitalization are totally different from the rules of Dari final flourishes, these sign painters typically print their entire signs in capital letters. Many of the English signs contain errors, which are nothing more than errors if viewed from a monolingual English point of view, but which are fascinating glimpses into the human mind and into the stresses resulting from languages and cultures in contact if viewed as bilingual phenomena. The sign-errors can be placed into a number of differnt categories depending on the nature of the bilingual interference. There are signs which reflect phonological intereference, like "WASH MAKER," "ASPRE PAINTING," "WASING OF CLOTHES," and "BOOK SALER." Some signs reflected morphological interference such as "KEYS MAKER," "ELECTRIC EQUIPMENTS," "PLUMBERING SHOP," or simply "PLUMBERY." Other signs reflected syntactic interference like "TAILOR FOR WOMAN," of "CARS WORK SHOP."

Since Dari speakers are anot accustomed to our Roman alphabet, there were many orthographic confusions. "ORY CLEANERS" is often spelled with an O rather than a D. In the sign "FIRST AID STATION" a P is used instead of an R, and in "ZAZAY RART SELLER" the opposite of this has occured. in "JANGALAK, S SELLSTORE" a comma is confused with an apostrophe; these two marks of punctuation are actually of the same form, but in a different position. "STHTIONERY" is spelled with an H rather than an A, and "FWMITURE" confuses URN with WM. Because Dari goes from right-to-left while English goes from left-to-right, many English words are written backwards by Dari speakers. Therefore the word IXAT andREBRAB are very common in the city of Kabul.

Various types of semantic interference exist. One sign reads, "GOODS ETC. STORE;" another reads "L. T. MINAN — PLUMBING AND PIPING," and still another reads "BARBARISM." One sign was especially difficult to decode. It read "FLOWER AND BUCKET MAKER," but the shopkeeper had nothing to do with the making of buckets. This sign-error was finally determined to be not bilingual interference at all, but rather *tri*lingual interference — (English-Dari-French), for the shopkeeper had intended to write "BOUQUET" instead of "BUCKET."

Dari also has some noun-noun compounds that are very interesting to an English speaker. A hedgehog is called *xaaposhtak* "little thorn back;" a rabbit is *xargosh "donkey ears;" a turtle is sangposht* "rock back," and a turkey is *filmorgh* "elephant chicken." Apricots are called *zardaaluw* "yellow plums," and tomatoes are called *baadanjaaneruwmiy* '7Roman eggplant." One of the most interesting Dari compounds is *chahaarmaghs*. This word means "four brains," and is the Dari term for walnut.

The Dari word for "mother-in-law" is *maadereshowhar*, and the Dari word for tongue is *zabaan*. This sets up a very interesting metaphor in the Dari name for the pickly-pear cactus — *zabaanemaadereshowhar* "mother-in-law's tongue." These examples used to illustrate the compounding process in addition are all dead metaphors. It should not be surprising that dead metaphors in English and Dari partially overlop but also partially do overlap. For example, the Persian word for lip, *lab* can be used not only to refer to the lip of a person or of a cup or of a saucer (as in English), but Dari also has the lip (bank) of a stream, the lip (brim) of a hat, the lip (shoulder) of a road, and the lip (beach) of an ocean.

In conclusion, people dealing with cultural pluralism should not be appalled by bilingua or bidialectical language mergers, but should appreciate them as a kind of bilingual folk-poetry.. When a speaker under the influence of Spanish refers to a *crippled table* this should be regarded as an interesting bilingual metaphor — after all, tables have "legs" and could very well be crippled. When a person under the influence of Frence refers to a *fcot of lettuce* rather than a *head of lettuce* it should be noted that at least both of these metaphors are based on parts of the body. When a person under the influence of Korean refers to a key person as an *egg yoke*, it should be remembered that English has a similar metaphor — egg *egg head*. When a Russian calls a handkerchief a *nose shawl*, and an Afghan refers to a kneecap as the *head of the knee*, the metaphors are related to each other through metonymy (association).

After all, language and cultural interference happens only in those instances where the speaker is dealing simultaneously with more than one language and culture. Rather than becoming upset on hearing a bilingual ambiguity or infelicity, a person's intellectual curiousity at two languages and cultures in contact should be peaked. In reference to bilingual "mistakes," whether they are made intentionally or unintentionally, listeners need to become — like Hyman Kaplan's snakes — "fescinated."

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